



FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

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For Immediate Release

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Park Authority Roots Out Unwanted, Invasive Plants

The Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) working hand-in-hand with local environmental and conservation groups launched a new volunteer program earlier this year in an effort to fight the spread of invasive plant species in county parks. The Invasive Management Area (IMA) Program is a pilot project led by 20 IMA leaders and an army of over 100 citizen volunteers with one goal in mind: to band together as ecological stewards to help our native plants survive.

IMA volunteers contribute to the preservation and management of the county's natural resources by pulling invasives and replanting native plants from April through October. The Park Authority Resource Management Division is working hard to control, if not eradicate a list of aggressive invasives which includes fast-growing, smothering plants like English ivy and kudzu; stiltgrass and mile-a-minute which form a dense carpet on the forest floor; and Japanese barberry, which alters the soil's pH balance and nutrients.

IMA leaders were trained by Park Authority staff in cooperation with the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District in order to give them the tools necessary to lead projects at 20 FCPA sites. Hard-working volunteers remove plants by hand, without the use of pesticides and heavy machinery. The days can be hot and buggy, but volunteers enjoy learning something new, spending time outdoors and working with friends and neighbors to improve parks in their communities.

Invasive plant species grow quickly, reach maturity and reproduce rapidly; taking over yards, gardens and forests. Many invasive plants are tolerant of a variety of habitats and environmental conditions, making them even more difficult to remove and control. Invasive plant species reduce the biological diversity of our natural areas by aggressively out-competing native plants, which reduces the quality of wildlife habitat and wildlife populations themselves.

After habitat loss, non-native, invasive species are the second most serious threat to the quality of natural areas and their ability to support wildlife. Over 100 million acres across the country – a tract of land the size of California – are infested with non-native plants. It's estimated that the US spends more than \$100 billion annually combating their spread, but the persistent plants still manage to invade 14 million new acres each year. Over the past 30 years, invasives have taken hold in our area, threatening our natural resources, and making land management more difficult.

In September, volunteers will be removing kudzu at Lake Accotink in Springfield and English ivy at Woodglen Lake in Fairfax Station. For more information on IMA sites or volunteering call the Resource Management Division at (703) 324-8674. Brochures with photographs for identifying invasive backyard and forest plants are available at FCPA sites. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources/nrp-ima.htm

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